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Article

Little Red Riding Hood Crime Films: Critical Variations on Criminal Themes

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Abstract

European and North American crime films since the 1990s reflect changing cinematic styles but also hardening political discourses around criminal responsibility and growing public fears of random violence and predatory strangers. The narrative structure and imagery of "Little Red Riding Hood" conventionally warns about the latter dangers, but can also offer a lesson in self-reliance and the necessity for private action to forestall them. The familiar story provides a malleable cultural referent for a number of films elucidating social, political, and criminological shifts concerning issues of crime, justice, and crime control around the turn of the millennium.

Keywords

Fairy tales; crime films; popular criminology; Little Red Riding Hood; popular culture; justice

Many Euro North Americans see fairy tales as light-hearted escapist visions that move inexorably toward the conclusion that "everybody lived happily ever after." Cultural theorists generally hold Walt Disney's fairy tale films primarily responsible for this view.[1]

1. E.g. Jack Zipes, "Grounding the Spell: The Fairy-Tale Film and Transformation," in Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix, eds., *Fairy Tale Films: Visions of Ambiguity* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2010), pp. ix–xiii.

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Though "Little Red Riding Hood" (ATU 333)[2] was the subject of Disney's first animated cartoon (1922),[3] it resembles Maria Tatar's quintet of "murder, mutilation, cannibalism, infanticide, and incest" in the Grimm brothers' collection,[4] rather than the Disney feature formula in which an innocent persecuted heroine meets and eventually marries a handsome prince. Without a hegemonic Disney text to restrain them, Euro North American creators have subjected ATU 333 to a tremendous variety of reconceptualizations in novels, short stories, children's literature, comic books, films, television productions, cartoons, video games, and advertisements.[5] Whatever their form or genre, some offer fairly straightforward tellings, while others parody the story, alter its genre (from wonder to horror, for example), and/or place it in a contemporary setting. Many explore crime, criminality, and criminal justice issues.

Why choose a fairy tale, and ATU 333 in particular, as a model or source for a crime film? Traditional narratives allow for multiple, open meanings and have long enabled discourse on recurring sociocultural problems across space and time.[6] The underlying structure of "Little Red Riding Hood" incorporates nurturers and aggressors, victims and rescuers. In many recent retellings, sometimes simultaneously, individual characters take both sides of these semiotic oppositions.[7] The same doubling and overlapping of figures forms an essential element of "Little Red Riding Hood" crime films – works that manifest the plot and/or central images of ATU 333 and relate them to some aspect of law-breaking and/or criminality. References go beyond one child in a red coat or a walk in the woods, though the films we discuss bend and even invert the tale's plot structures and characters. Seldom unidimensional, both innocents and villains confront dangers – not only those lurking in the woods but also those much closer to home. More complex and ambivalent than traditional ATU 333 narratives, these films question simple remedies to the problem of "wolfish" violence, which run the gamut from vigilantism to redemption. In short, since the 1990s, this narrative structure and imagery has offered European and North American film makers and viewers a critical metaphorical tool, a malleable cultural referent to engage – often critically – with crime and criminal justice, "a refraction of discord and anxiety" in local and broader contexts.[8]

2. A[arne] T[hompson] U[ther] folktale numbers were originated by Antti Aarne, developed by Stith Thompson, and updated by Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography* (3 vols) (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004).
3. http://www.disneyshorts.org/shorts.aspx?shortID=2 The Encyclopedia of Disney Animated Shorts, February 21, 2011.
4. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 3.
5. Discussed, e.g., in Sandra L. Beckett, *Recycling Red Riding Hood* (New York: Routledge, 2002) and Catherine Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
6. See e.g. Jack Zipes, *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
7. Rita Ghesquiere, "Little Red Riding Hood where are you going?" in Paul Catteeuw, Marc Jacobs, Sigrid Rieuwerts, Eddy Tielemans, and Katrien Van Effelterre, eds., *Toplore: Stories and Songs* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2006), pp. 84–99.
8. We thank one anonymous reviewer for this excellent gloss.

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Trends in filmmaking and broader socio-political developments that bear on contemporary understandings of crime converge in the films we discuss. Postmodern approaches to filmmaking emerging since the 1990s have blurred generic boundaries; none of the films we discuss here offers a simple fairy tale. Moreover, these works draw inspiration and meaning from their contemporary socio-political environment while simultaneously adding to the broader political and cultural conversation about the causes and consequences of crime. The familiar narrative of wolves and innocents, predators and victims, villains and heroes in ATU 333 provides means for film makers to subvert audience expectations for storybook endings in movies, and to critique accepted wisdom about the causes and consequences of crime. Before turning to the films, we introduce interpretations of "Little Red Riding Hood" and offer an abbreviated summary of perspectives on crime films, focusing from the 1990s to the present. After close readings of individual films, we reflect on how ATU 333 provides film makers and audiences with opportunities for critical reflection on crime.

I. "Little Red Riding Hood" in Tradition and Scholarship

"Little Red Riding Hood" is an international traditional tale. Hans-Jörg Uther's index notes versions from some 40 ethnolinguistic groups.[9] Most Euro North Americans know the one from Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's collections in which Little Red Cap, bringing a food basket to her grandmother, meets a wolf in the forest. He asks where she is going, and then precedes her to the house where he swallows Grandmother. When Red arrives, Wolf has installed himself in Grandmother's bed, in her clothes. Red comments, in a formulaic series, what big ears, hands, and teeth the grandmother/wolf has, and he eats her too. A passing hunter shoots Wolf and rescues both Grandmother and Red. They place stones in Wolf's belly so that when he tries to escape he dies.[10] Two other European forms of this narrative, distinguishable mainly by their endings, offer different possibilities. In the text published by Charles Perrault in 1697, no saviour delivers Red and Grandmother; the moral is:

> Children, especially attractive, well bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf. I say "wolf," but there are various kinds of wolves. There are also those who are charming, quiet, polite, unassuming, complacent, and sweet, who pursue young women at home and in the streets. And unfortunately, it is these gentle wolves who are the most dangerous ones of all.[11]

A third ending, found in oral French versions, involves Red's self-rescue, with female helpers. She recognizes that Wolf is not her grandmother, but goes along with his plot, removing her clothes and getting into bed. Then she tells Wolf she must go outside to

9. Uther, *Types*, p. 225.
10. The Grimms edited and published seven versions of their collection, 1812–1857. See Jack Zipes, ed., *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), pp. xxx–xxxi.
11. http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html#perrault D.L. Ashliman, Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts, February 21, 2011.

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relieve herself. Suspicious, he attaches a string to her leg, but she unties it. When he discovers her ruse, Wolf runs after her. At the river, washerwomen on the other bank throw sheets across and pull Red to safety. They offer to do the same for Wolf, but let go when he is in the middle of the stream and he drowns.[12] These three simple structures ground a myriad of elaborations.

Academics across the disciplines have read "Little Red Riding Hood" using an assortment of theoretical lenses.[13] Sometimes her stereotypically feminine characteristics seem overdetermined: "Little Red Riding Hood makes her little detour, does what women should never do, travels through her own forest. She allows herself the forbidden … and pays dearly for it."[14] Alternatively, she can be understood as "cross-gendered in her narrative position: she plays principal boy, 'plunges' into the wood, 'plucks' flowers, makes things happen."[15] A historical materialist/social realist perspective suggests that the tale's 17th century audience would have been concerned with hunger and the active dangers of the outside world.[16] Symbolic analysis sees the tale as a counterpart to an occupational and sexual rite of passage for young women.[17] Probably the best known psychological interpretation argues for child ambivalence and oedipal conflicts in puberty and sexuality.[18] ATU 333 has even been seen as a mythic ritual narrative of the sun's daily progress (the wolf is night to Red's sun, daily delivered from his belly); alternatively Red is spring, reborn from the wolf of winter.[19]

For many scholars, however, ATU 333 implicates sex and sexuality. Marina Warner argues that "Little Red Riding Hood" "contains ... deeply disturbing adult material."[20] Steven Swann Jones explores contemporary North American jokes about "Little Red

12. See Yvonne Verdier, "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge dans la Tradition Orale," *Le Debat* 3 (1980), pp. 31–56. David Kaplan's short film *Little Red Riding Hood* (1997) follows this structure, minus female helpers.
13. See texts and analyses in Jack Zipes, ed., *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1983) and Alan Dundes, ed., *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). Theoretical perspectives are critiqued in Francisco Vaz da Silva, *Metamorphosis: The Dynamics of Symbolism in European Fairy Tales* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 113–62.
14. Hélène Cixous, trans. Annette Kuhn, "Castration or Decapitation?" *Signs* 7 (1981) 1, p. 43.
15. Feona Attwood, "Who's Afraid of Little Red Riding Hood? Male Desire, Phantasy and Impersonation in the Telling of a Fairytale," *Thamyris* 6 (1999) 1, p. 100.
16. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).
17. Verdier, "Chaperon."
18. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976), pp. 166–83.
19. Mary Douglas, "Red Riding Hood: An Interpretation from Anthropology," *Folklore* 106 (1995), pp. 1–7. Further, the Nazis interpreted "Red Riding Hood as the symbol of the German folk, plagued by the wolf: the Jews. The Huntsman who rescued Red Riding Hood could not be anyone else, of course, but Adolf Hitler." Linda Dégh, "Grimm's 'Household Tales' and Its Place in the Household: The Social Relevance of a Controversial Classic," *Western Folklore* 38 (1979) 2, p. 95.
20. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 269.

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Riding Hood" to show how this notion is understood by the story's current audiences.[21] Feminist post-structuralist Hélène Cixous understands it as narrating women's sex and sexuality: "the 'red riding hood' in question is a little clitoris. Little Red Riding Hood basically gets up to some mischief: she's the little female sex that tries to play a bit and sets out with her little pot of butter and her little jar of honey."[22] Marjorie Garber argues that "the confrontation with the wolf in bed ... is pervasively and complicatedly erotic."[23] Catherine Velay-Vallantin notes that "'Little Red Riding Hood' is the story of a sexual initiation. In the worst of cases, this story stages a rape, even if the act of devouring, a sexual symbol par excellence, also involves the grandmother."[24] Indeed, Susan Brownmiller famously comments in *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* that

> *Red Riding Hood* is a parable of rape. There are frightening male figures abroad in the woods – we call them wolves, among other names – and females are helpless before them. Better stick close to the path, better not be adventurous. If you are lucky, a *good, friendly* male may be able to save you from certain disaster.[25]

As traditional narratives circulate through generations and across vast territories, faithfulness to a source text becomes less relevant than adaptation to new circumstances. Thus, these films' play with characters and plot is consistent with other versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" in other forms. The films we discuss, in re-visioning ATU 333, actually follow tradition rather than breaking with it, for as Tatar observes, "no fairy tale text is sacred."[26] Though the Internet Movie DataBase (IMDB) lists 71 "Little Red Riding Hood" films and 31 which reference the tale, we limit discussion here to released, feature length, live action works available in English or French, with contemporary, realistic settings. For critical and practical reasons, we eliminated works with magical, fantasy, or historicized fairy tale settings, television productions, shorts, animated cinema, and movies unavailable in English or French.[27] The seven films – all of those

21. "Joking Transformations of Popular Fairy Tales: A Comparative Analysis of Five Jokes and Their Fairy Tale Sources," *Western Folklore* 44 (1985) 2, pp. 97–114.
22. Cixous, "Castration," p. 43.
23. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 387.
24. "From 'Little Red Riding Hood' to the 'Beast of Gévaudan:' The Tale in the Long Term Continuum," Binita Mehta, trans., in Francesca Canadé Sautman, Diana Conchado, and Giuseppe Carlo di Scipio, eds., *Telling Tales: Medieval Narratives and the Folk Tradition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 271.
25. (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1975), p. 310. Several films explicitly sexualize the narrative (see Zipes, *Enchanted*, pp. 134–57), including Kaplan's *Little Red Riding Hood*, noted above, *A Wicked Tale* (2005), and *Red Hot Riding Hood* (1943).
26. *Off With Their Heads: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 229.
27. IMDB, accessed April 27, 2011. Arguably, realistic settings and renderings suggest a more serious intent in addressing crime; the conditions of production and reception for television differ from the cinema's; short films limit the exposition of complex ideas; and our linguistic capabilities are in English and French only. We address *every film currently available* which fits these criteria except for *Hanna*, released theatrically in April 2011, but not on DVD at the time of writing. We eliminate, for example, *Pro Krasnuyu Shapochku* (1977) in which

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released up to December 2010 that meet our criteria – (in order of release) are *Freeway* (Matthew Bright, 1996, US), *The Wolves of Kromer* (Will Gould, 1998, UK), *Promenons-nous dans les bois/Deep in the Woods* (Lionel Delplanque, 2000, France), *Little Erin Merryweather* (David Morwick, 2003, US), *Red Riding Hood* (Giacomo Cimini, 2003, Italy), *The Woodsman* (Nicole Kassell, 2003, US), and *Hard Candy* (David Slade, 2005, US). British, French, and Italian as well as American, neither straightforward adaptations nor family films aimed at children, these films also incorporate the genres of horror, slasher, suspense, drama, comedy, and thriller. All explore the unfolding of crimes – murder, attempted murder, rape, child molestation, serial killing, fraud, and assassination – their investigation, and/or their consequences. They consider institutional and societal reactions to crime and transgression, including criminal trials, incarceration, parole, and vigilantism.

II. Crime Films, c. 1990–present

Crime and criminal justice have been enduring subjects of filmmaking since the medium's inception at the turn of the 20th century. Through various time periods, films have reflected and sometimes critiqued contemporary practices and assumptions about crime's causes and societal responses to criminal transgression. Popular culture both contributes to and draws meaning from its broader socio-political context. Cinema engages with the politics and cultural ethos of its times. Crime films in particular tend to engage with their contemporary professional wisdom and political discourses.[28] Philip Jenkins, for example, links popular and professional discourses on serial murder and child molestation in his social constructionist analyses.[29] We similarly chart broad alterations in crime control policy alongside cinematic developments speaking to changes in societal understandings in North America and Europe. Such shifts do not necessarily *drive* the content of films (or the reverse); rather, crime films and official crime policies provide

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the wolf's family sets out to avenge his death, because of its magical fairy tale setting and lack of availability in English; the made-for-television *1974* (2009) and *1983* (2009), which incorporate references to innocent rape/murder victims wearing red (hooded) jackets with the so-called "Red Riding" – the West Riding of Yorkshire; the animated, fantasy-setting *Hoodwinked!* (2005) and *Jin-Rô/Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade* (1998); as well as *The Brothers Grimm* (2005) and *Red Riding Hood* (2011) with their historical setting and magical motivations for criminality. On ATU 333 films, see Zipes, *Enchanted*, pp. 134–57. See also Pauline Greenhill and Steven Kohm, "Little Red Riding Hood and the Pedophile in Film: *Freeway*, *Hard Candy*, and *The Woodsman*," *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Culture* 1 (2009) 2, 35–65.

28. See e.g. Timothy Lenz, "Conservatism in American Crime Films," *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 12 (2005) 2, 116–34; Nicole Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society* 2nd edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Philip Simpson, *Psycho Paths: Tracking the Serial Killer Through Contemporary American Film and Fiction* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000); Mariana Valverde, *Law and Order: Images, Meanings, Myths* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006).
29. *Using Murder: The Social Construction of Serial Murder* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1994); *Moral Panic: Changing Conceptions of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

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context rendering one another intelligible. For example, *Dirty Harry* (1971) explicitly critiques US Supreme Court decisions while acting as a popular cultural referent for politicians and moral entrepreneurs who want to get tougher on crime.

Most Anglo-North American crime films of the last century tended to avoid criticizing contemporary practices, instead conferring pleasure on audiences through what Nicole Rafter terms a "double movement."[30] Thus, conventional crime films allow audiences to consume representations of criminal transgression, gratifyingly confident that perpetrators will ultimately be rooted out, morally condemned, and punished dearly for their wrongdoing. Most mainstream crime films follow a predictable moralizing pattern of "violation, discovery, punishment, and resolution."[31] Exceptions like *film noir* and the hard-boiled American crime films of the 1940s and 1950s, with their cynical corrosive tone, may reverse the polarity – good is punished and evil rewarded. Nevertheless, they generally shy away from criticizing state agents of justice, instead presenting morally ambiguous and easily corruptible hero figures who are outsiders to the criminal justice system, such as private detectives, newspaper reporters, and insurance investigators.[32] While *film noir* legal dramas address failures of justice like wrongful convictions and lynch mobs, audiences can nevertheless "have it both ways, identifying with outsiders to the justice system who end up as saviors of law and order."[33]

Films that Rafter terms critical, alternative, and morally ambiguous – apt descriptions for those we consider here – have grown in importance in the latter part of the 20th century. Lacking the reassurance of immorality thoroughly punished and order restored, critical crime films "take human evil for granted, assuming that people are fundamentally selfish and justice systems easily corrupted. Even when such films are clear about where right and wrong lie, they may show wrong thriving and virtue being crushed."[34] While few such works were produced in North America before 1970, excellent international examples include Akira Kurosawa's *Rashômon* (Japan, 1950) and Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (France, 1960). Following their lead, American films like Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) and Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976) set a new tone for crime films.

Generally, crime films produced over the last century reflect contemporary institutional and commonsense knowledge about crime's nature and etiology. In the immediate postwar period, cinema tended to replicate dominant criminological and psychological wisdom about crime's causes, arguing for rehabilitation and treatment for offenders suffering from mental or even physical afflictions. Indicating the dominance of Freudian psychoanalysis, many early postwar-period works located the derivation of offending in childhood traumas. Perhaps the best-known movie to adopt this perspective was Alfred Hitchcock's iconic horror/thriller *Psycho* (1960). Mariana Valverde notes that Anthony Perkins' iconic performance of Norman Bates not only influenced subsequent filmic

30. Rafter, *Shots*, p. 3.
31. Rafter, *Shots*, p. 74.
32. Valverde, *Law*, p. 95.
33. Rafter, *Shots*, p. 145.
34. Rafter, *Shots*, p. 213.

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portrayals, but also shaped "people's understanding of what a 'psycho' looks like."[35] By the 1970s, however, films shifted their focus to sociological explanations for crime and collectively suggested that its roots might be found in social contexts.

Such environmental explanations feature prominently in Scorsese's films of the 1970s: *Mean Streets* (1972) and *Taxi Driver*, reflecting liberal thinking, "particularly the belief that the primary causes of crime are social conditions such as poverty."[36] These ideas mirrored shifts in crime policy under the US Johnson Administration, with interventions moving from individual treatment and therapy to the eradication of poverty, inner-city slums, and criminogenic social conditions. However, as crime rates continued to rise, disillusionment and frustration with Johnson's war on poverty set in. While key US Supreme Court decisions like *Miranda* clarified the rights of the accused, a general sense of dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system became apparent. Thus, Timothy Lenz notes a cycle of conservative, vigilante-themed films typified by *Dirty Harry* and *Death Wish* (1974), depicting crime as the out-of-control product of liberal emphasis on individual rights and due process.[37]

Following widespread public dissatisfaction with the liberal crime control policies of the 1970s, the political and criminological landscape radically altered through the 1980s. Conservative governments ushered into power in Europe and North America shifted from social prevention and individual treatment to classical deterrence theory and rational choice perspectives. No longer viewed as sick and/or underprivileged, criminals instead became rational actors making immoral choices. Punitive sentencing replaced social crime prevention programs, and harsher penalties and mandatory incarceration replaced rehabilitation and treatment.[38] By the 1990s, the political terrain for crime policy was further traced with neoliberal social and economic policies.[39] Governments retreating from social service provision invoked rhetoric holding individuals responsible for ensuring their own protection from economic and social misfortune. Communities and individuals were "empowered" to take up the fight against crime, and the private security industry rushed to fill the vacuum left by the state's rollback. Thus, 1990s crime films must be understood against a backdrop of rising levels of anxiety about crime and economic insecurity, growing disparities between the wealthy and poor under neoliberal economic policies, and a prison population increasing fast in the US due to punitive sentencing. The seven films we discuss below must be understood in the North American and European social and economic contexts of the 1990s and beyond. They reflect, refract and sometimes subvert the broader cultural conversation about crime, demonstrate contemporary shifts in filmmaking, and show some new directions for crime films in particular. As films have become more self-referential in an era of postmodern cinema, this broad sweep of crime film history sets the stage for our in-depth discussion below.

35. *Law*, p. 122
36. Timothy Lenz, *Changing Images of Law in Film and Television Crime Stories* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 45.
37. "Conservatism," pp. 116–34.
38. Rafter, *Shots*, p. 90.
39. David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

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The 1990s saw more critical crime films, a breakdown of traditional generic cinematic conventions, and the creation of new genres reflecting socio-political shifts. Drew Todd traces "a rejection of linear storytelling, of expectations of genre conventions, and of easy distinctions between right and wrong."[40] In the US, works by David Lynch, the Coen Brothers, Oliver Stone, and Quentin Tarantino typified "postmodern" and "absurdist" filmmaking through the decade. Hallmarks of this new breed included "playfulness (sometimes deadpan, as in *Fargo* [1996]), multiple points of view (*Reservoir Dogs* [1992]), concern with identity and identity politics (*Natural Born Killers* [1994]), irreverence (including a refusal to take themselves too seriously), eclecticism, and self-reflexivity."[41] All these characteristics can be seen in the films we discuss, such as *The Wolves of Kromer*, which takes up identity politics in particular. This aesthetic's emergence in American filmmaking was greeted by box office success, particularly for Tarantino and the Coen Brothers. Thus, cultural spaces for considering alternative perspectives on crime opened up alongside, and even within, films reflecting the traditional pattern of evil defeated and morality restored.

A number of new crime film subjects emerged. For example, the 1990s saw the solidification of the serial killer as a popular cultural icon, commodified and represented through a variety of media and cultural forms.[42] According to Philip Simpson, 1990s serial killer films like *Kalifornia* (1993), *Natural Born Killers*, and *Seven* (1995) tended to "subordinate or dispense with social critique in favor of depictions of apocalyptic … levels of violence." Their cinematic serial murderers seemed "so dehumanized by a combination of lived and media experience with violence that they are incapable of accepting, or even recognizing, more constructive options."[43] California's infamous 1994 three-strikes law became that year's "fastest spreading anti-crime fad."[44] While many non-violent lawbreakers were swept up by the statute, the public associated such measures with violent serial offenders. The serial killer's rise as a staple of 1990s crime films reflected a general fear of random violence. Despite falling rates of violent crime in most Western nations;[45] "a new criminal stereotype had taken hold in the public imagination, that of the superpredator, more monster than human, psychopathic, sexually deviant, and ubiquitous."[46]

Alongside the serial killer (seen in *Freeway*, *Promenons-nous dans les bois, Little Erin Merryweather, Red Riding Hood*, and *Hard Candy*, discussed below), the pedophile/child molester offered an even more controversial cinematic villain in the 1990s and beyond (as in *Freeway*, *Little Erin Merryweather, The Woodsman*, and *Hard Candy*). Part serial offender and part violent sexual deviant, the popular-culture

40. "The History of Crime Films," in Rafter, *Shots*, p. 51.
41. Todd, "History," pp. 53–4.
42. Brian Jarvis, "Monsters Inc.: Serial Killers and Consumer Culture," *Crime, Media, Culture* 3 (2007) 3, pp. 326–44.
43. *Psycho*, p. 174.
44. Ray Surette, "News From Nowhere, Policy to Follow: Media and the Social Construction of 'Three Strikes and You're Out,'" in David Shichor and Dale Sechrest, eds., *Three Strikes and You're Out: Vengeance as Public Policy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), p. 178.
45. Garland, *Culture*.
46. Rafter, *Shots*, p. 91.

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pedophile emerged on the heels of several successive panics over ritual sexual child abuse in schools, daycare centers and churches through the 1970s and 1980s.[47] Yet several films about pedophiles made in the 1990s and beyond, such as Andrew Jarecki's *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003), took critical stances and adopted postmodern approaches to storytelling.[48] Relying on home movies shot by the Friedman family from Great Neck, New York, the film interrogates and disrupts claims against father Arnold and son Jesse Friedman, accused of molesting children enrolled in computer classes run out of the family home. Television news footage, home movies, and interviews amass a montage of clues suggesting Arnold's probable innocence of these particular allegations, though confirming his sexual attraction to young boys. In quintessential postmodern style, *Capturing the Friedmans* questions the nature of truth in child sexual abuse cases. The film demonstrates that while legal proceedings and news reports construct a hegemonic, dominant version of the truth, equally plausible understandings may be crafted by documentary film makers.

Fictional films about pedophiles made at the turn of the millennium similarly offer sympathetic and disruptive portrayals of perpetrators. *L.I.E.* (2001) presents the neighborhood pedophile as a quasi father figure to runaway boys but also as a repulsive sexual predator cruising rest stops along the Long Island Expressway. *Mystic River* (2003) interrogates the long-term impact of child sexual abuse on one close-knit Boston community while simultaneously cautioning audiences about the dangers of vigilantism. *The Woodsman* views the pedophile in conflicted, often sympathetic, terms, while *Little Children* (2006) invites questions about sex offender notification laws. Such films present complex and postmodern approaches to crime by constructing the pedophile as a problematic and multidimensional figure.

Turn-of-the-millennium crime films deliver eclectic approaches to problems of law, order, and justice. Many continue to offer easy identification with heroes who restore order, or likable villains who go awry but are legally and morally condemned in the end. However, a growing minority of alternative cinema adopts more complex moral and aesthetic positions, while continuing to reflect and at times challenge commonsense understanding of criminal justice problems and practices. These works convey a popular criminological discourse that reveals much about crime's place, as well as its moral, ethical, and philosophical dimensions, in contemporary culture.[49] Crime films employing the narrative structure and imagery of "Little Red Riding Hood" reflect many of the themes and aesthetics of the 1990s and beyond. The films we discuss complicate the traditional moral pattern found in most twentieth century crime films while simultaneously disrupting the potentially simple contours of the ATU 333 narrative. "Little Red Riding Hood" crime films do not offer audiences easy identification with blameless innocents victimized by wolfish strangers; nor are they resolved by uncomplicated vengeance. Rather, they use the familiar structure of ATU 333 to thwart audiences' expectations of storybook

47. Jenkins, *Moral*.
48. See also Susan Bandes, "The Lessons of *Capturing the Friedmans*: Moral Panic, Institutional Denial and Due Process," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 3 (2007) 2, pp. 293–319.
49. Rafter, "Crime, Film and Criminology: Recent Sex-Crime Movies," *Theoretical Criminology* 11 (2007) 3, pp. 403–20.

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justice – for example, to query the conventional associations of men with the wolf (aggressor) and hunter (rescuer) roles and women with the Red (passive victim) role – usually exhibiting the playfulness, irreverence, multiple points of view, eclecticism, reflexivity, identity politics, and absurdity Todd finds in postmodern crime films. All interrogate crime's causes and consequences and engage to varying degrees with the sociopolitical implications of crime and crime control. For each film, we address academic discourse (if any) on it and summarize the plot, then discuss its use of elements from ATU 333 which implicate issues of criminality and criminal justice.

1 Freeway (American, 1996)

This darkly sardonic film directly reworks the narrative structure and imagery of "Little Red Riding Hood" to comedic and at times critical effect. Though *Variety*'s reviewer called it "roadkill" and "a sophomoric and morally repellant mix of fractured fairy tale, juvenile social satire, bloody mayhem and overstated B-movie melodrama,"[50] subsequent evaluations, including Zipes', recognize it as "one of the more innovative and politically meaningful recreations of the Red Riding Hood fairy tale."[51] Appearing near the end of a period of moral panic around child sexual abuse in the 1980s and 1990s, *Freeway* manifested some of the pro-vigilante ethos of its time. This cinematic reimagining of popular criminological themes becomes all the more potent because it subverts and inverts traditional characterizations and plot devices in ATU 333. *Freeway* complicates traditional genre boundaries, and eclectically employs elements of western, action, prison, buddy, female exploitation, and road films.

Like many more recent films, it simultaneously criticizes the legal system and declines to judge its criminalized underclass subjects. Kimberley Roberts dubs *Freeway* "the 'angry girl' film par excellence."[52] Catherine Orenstein says that "*Freeway* transforms the fairy tale into a critique of modern society – exaggerating and then debunking stereotypes of race, class and gender and mocking the fairy tale even as it carries on the tradition. The film not only gives the characters of 'Little Red Riding Hood' a new set and wardrobe; it also restores the original lesson in self-reliance."[53] Sara Martin comments, "As a fantasy of empowerment, *Freeway* is ... effective ... especially because by casting in the role of the heroine a young woman of questionable behaviour it stresses the idea that all victims deserve protection."[54]

The film sets up Vanessa Lutz (Reese Witherspoon) as an illiterate 16 year old. When her mother and stepfather are arrested, Vanessa ditches her social worker, picks up a gun from her boyfriend Chopper Wood (Bokeem Woodbine) – immediately killed in a drive-by shooting – and sets off to her grandmother's house. When her car breaks down on the

50. Joe Leydon, "*Freeway* Film Review," *Variety*, Jan. 29–Feb. 4 (1996), p. 67.
51. *Enchanted*, p. 153.
52. "Pleasures and Problems of the 'Angry Girl,'" in Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance, eds., *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2002), p. 217.
53. *Uncloaked*, p. 227.
54. "Little Red Riding Hood Meets the Werewolf: Genre and Gender Tensions in Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves*," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 12 (2001) 1, p. 30.

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freeway, sleazy child psychologist Bob Wolverton (Kiefer Sutherland) picks her up, but turns out to be the "freeway killer," preying on young girls. Vanessa easily subdues Wolverton and shoots him several times, leaving him for dead. He survives. Vanessa is arrested and placed in juvenile detention. With her female friends, she breaks out of prison but continues alone to her grandmother's house, followed by two cops who, finally realizing that she is innocent, want to save her. Preceding them, Wolverton murders Vanessa's grandmother and hides in her bed, dressed in her clothes. Vanessa soon recognizes him – "Them's some big ugly fuckin' teeth you got, Bob" – and chokes him to death, leaving the house to meet the cops who have arrived too late to help.

References to ATU 333 include Vanessa's boyfriend Chopper Wood and her red outfit and basket, the journey to grandmother's house, and the wolf statue in Wolverton's home. Yet once he meets Vanessa, Wolverton's hitherto successful masquerade as woodsman is over. Though he rhetorically inverts the traditional wolf–Red relationship when he implores "You're going to have to trust me. You're going to have to let me in," his evil plan is obvious. He remains a fairly one-dimensional wolf. When Vanessa shoots and horribly disfigures him, the viewer knows he is monster not victim.

Feminist and women-centered revisions of ATU 333 like *Freeway* have generally made Red the hero, not the heroine/victim. Vanessa, as Red, expresses an active agency that is "significant and pleasurable precisely because the expression of anger has hitherto been the unspoken domain of men and boys."[55] Director Bright acknowledges this view of Vanessa, saying "I guess I'm just a feminist at heart."[56] But Vanessa's ruthlessness against at best prejudiced and weak human obstacles, and at worst explicitly murderous ones, invokes not only Red, but also the wolf. Both victim and survivor, within the film's diegesis, her victimhood is fleeting and vigorously resisted.[57] As "lone wolf" in the end, Vanessa's role is ambivalent.[58] Her creator Bright commented, she "looks like a psychopath but she's not – or if she is, she's a good psychopath." Roberts concurs; "those with power are the real wolves."[59] Thus, Vanessa gives voice to those who believe that when it comes to predators like Wolverton, perhaps Euro North Americans ought to understand a little less and condemn a bit more. In a revealing exchange with Bob just before she shoots him, Vanessa articulates the sentiments of victims outraged at criminals who try to wear the mantle of victimhood. Countering Bob's sobbing pleas to spare him because he is a "profoundly sick man," Vanessa retorts:

> I know there's a lot of sick guys that get hard thinkin' about messin' women up. Hell, that's all you ever see on TV. But when a guy goes and does that for real like you were plannin' on doin' … when a guy goes and hurts someone who never hurt them, that makes them a criminal first and a sick guy second. It's like being sick has to take second place to being crooked. And Bob, you're crooked.

55. Roberts, "Pleasures," p. 222.
56. DVD commentary.
57. Laura Madeline Wiseman, "Carnivalesque and Bifurcated Labels: Writing the Tale," *Nebula* 2 (2005) 1, p. 86.
58. Roberts, "Pleasures," p. 223.
59. "Pleasures," p. 225.

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Freeway adeptly uses ATU 333's narrative structure to powerfully restate the vigilante theme that often figures in its contemporaries. Less reflective of its time is *Freeway*'s feminist view of criminalized women in particular coping with difficulties laid upon them by an uncaring, structurally ruthless society and male authority figures. Furthermore, *Freeway* takes direct aim at California Governor Pete Wilson – a key architect of the state's three-strikes sentencing law. Televised tough talk by Wilson and pleas of victimization by Wolverton juxtapose with Vanessa's unjust incarceration for defending herself against a serial predator/killer. Where tough sentencing laws have failed to produce justice, direct private action by criminalized girls must bridge the gap.

2 *The Wolves of Kromer (British, 1998)*

As in the traditional ATU 333 narrative, "[t]he human and wolf societies in this film exist side-by-side, ambivalent and even hostile to each other."[60] The "once upon a time, not so very long ago" opening voice-over (by Boy George) signals a fairy tale – even in the vernacular sense, since it centers upon lycanthrophobia as a metaphor for homophobia. In the otherwise realistic setting of a small English village, residents of the woods and wilds beyond are (gay male) wolves with pointed ears, claw fingernails, bare feet, and tails, dressed in fur coats and ragged clothing. The villagers hate and fear these outsiders, and periodically hunt them.

Fanny (Rita Davies), with her friend Doreen (Margaret Towner), is poisoning their employer Mrs. Drax (Rosemarie Dunham). They call the vicar, Father David (Kevin Moore), to her bedside, but also her son Mark (David Prescott) who arrives with his wife Mary (Angharad Rees), teenaged daughter Polly (Leila Lloyd-Evelyn) and young son Kester (Matthew Dean). Meanwhile, the relationship blossoms between wolves Gabriel (James Layton) and Seth (Lee Williams). Fanny and Doreen take Mrs. Drax (grandmother) in her wheelchair and leave her in the woods. The wolves, suspected in her death, are hunted by the townspeople, who include several closeted wolves. When Gabriel has sex with someone else, Seth questions his own orientation. He meets Polly, dressed in a red jacket, in the woods, and she seduces him. Eventually Seth realises "I guess I just prefer wolves," and declares his love for Gabriel, whom the vicar has murdered. Father David shoots Seth too, and then walks from the church crime scene, his tail revealed under his vestments. The family realises Fanny and Doreen are responsible for Grandmother's death and they are removed by the police. As Father David begins a sermon on "the wickedness of wolves," Mary, Polly, Kester, and Mark sing "Jerusalem" to drown out his hypocrisy. Its rejection of lycanthrophobia/homophobia confirmed, the film closes with the dead wolves and grandmother dancing together to "Spirit in the Sky."

Writer/producer Charles Lambert calls it "a tragic romance," and suggests that "the play with Red Riding Hood" begins when the red-jacketed Polly meets Seth in the woods. (A red jacket signals an ATU 333 link in *Freeway* and several other films we consider below.) He notes that "here what we tried to do was reflect a contemporary,

60. Phillip A. Bernhardt-House, "The Werewolf as Queer, the Queer as Werewolf, and Queer Werewolves," in Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird, eds., *Queering the Non/Human* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), p. 177.

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more positive position where there's more equality perhaps between the wolf and Little Red. And perhaps nowadays it's the wolf who needs rescuing."[61] But viewers would locate the first reference at the film's opening, when seemingly grandmotherly Doreen, singing girlishly and swinging her basket, meets wolves Seth and Gabriel on the road. Throughout, the characters map less directly onto their prototypes than in *Freeway*. The worst the viewer *knows* the wolves are guilty of is petty theft, and in the end Fanny and Doreen are most wolfish in their greed and vicious homicidal intentions. The marked Red character, Polly, is by no means central. Some hunters, like the Vicar, sport closet wolfish tendencies; one gets his tail caught in a vehicle door. The most innocent character is Kester, but his parents suspect him of wolfish inclinations. As in *Freeway*, the character multiplication – wolves and grandmothers as reds, grandmothers and hunters as wolves – complicates the conventional attribution of blame and guilt. Yet *Wolves* never sides with vigilantes, accusing many of internalized lycanthro(homo)phobia. Questions of fact (who killed Grandmother) become less important than ones around hypocrisy and homophobia. By recognizing and then subverting popular associations between wolves and predatory violence, the film uses the narrative structure and characters of ATU 333 to critically re-examine sensitive issues relating to crime and vengeance. Postmodern genre b(l)ending in *Wolves* implicates fairy tale, fantasy, and comedy genres alike, while critically interrogating issues of hate crime and vengeance. As with *Freeway*, this film is best understood in the context of shifting approaches to filmmaking as well as changing socio-political discourses about crime and vigilantism at the turn of the millennium. The closing dance by the wolves and grandmother playfully underlines its identity politics, allying those too often ignored, exploited, and harmed by institutions allegedly created to serve them, from the Christian church to the police.

3 *Deep in the Woods* (Promenons-nous dans les bois) *(French, 2000)*

"The title … taken from a popular French song associated with the children's game 'Loup y es-tu?' is full of childhood resonances for Francophone viewers."[62] This "part fairy-tale riff ... and part generic slasher film" opens with "a mother … reading aloud the story of Little Red Riding Hood in a fairy-tale-like room before being precipitously garroted by an unseen killer."[63] She has given her child a Red Riding Hood doll. The main action involves five young actors who leave the city and drive through the woods to an isolated house to perform "Little Red Riding Hood" as a play for a young Nicholas (Thibault Truffert) and his wheelchair-bound grandfather Axel de Fersen (François Berléand). With *Wolves*, the film incorporates homosexual themes, including grandfather's attraction to actor Wilfried (Vincent Lecoeur) and two lesbian players, Sophie (Clotilde Courau) and Jeanne (Alexia Stresis) – as well as heterosexual couple Matthieu (Clément Sibony) and Mathilde (Maud Buquet). Predictably for its genre, a rapist/killer preys upon the actors. The ending offers a decidedly queer proto-nuclear family driving away from the chateau: heterosexual dad

61. DVD commentary.
62. Sandra L. Beckett, *Red Riding Hood for All Ages: A Fairy-Tale Icon in Cross-Cultural Contexts* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2008), p. 208.
63. Derek Elley, "*Deep in the Woods* Review," *Variety*, Sept. 4–Sept 10 (2000), p. 28.

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Matthieu, lesbian mom Sophie, and the undoubtedly scarred boy Nicholas. The "[h]astily explained story background near the end is nigh incomprehensible."[64]

"Little Red Riding Hood" is narrated twice – first at the film's opening, and then in the play-within-the-movie. Passing references include Matthieu biting his girlfriend Mathilde on the arm, implicating ATU 333's sex/cannibalism. As the five "Reds" drive through the woods on their way to the grandfather's house, an old grandmotherly figure dressed in black heads away from the chateau to care for her ill nephew. Brian Yuzna indicates that director Lionel Delplanque intended the scene as a reverse Red Riding Hood reference – grandmother not Red, goes to town not deeper into the woods, wearing black not red, to care for her nephew not vice-versa.[65] Wolf references pervade, including Serge Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf" as diegetical music at the play's start. The two actors who play Red, Jeanne and Mathilde, die. The killer is first revealed in the wolf costume that Matthieu (who survives) wears in the play. Following its genre, the film sets up viewers to suspect nearly every character. Thus, roles of (potential) Red, wolf, and woodsman are distributed and exchanged throughout, but undermined. For example, a police officer, an obvious woodsman candidate, is killed within minutes of his appearance.

Grandfather Axel, assisted by his rapist servant, turns out to be the murderer. Here the doubling that characterizes both Little Red Riding Hood crime films and slashers gives Axel a literal dual personality – the weakling in the wheelchair and his homicidal and perfectly able alter ego. Following the well-established, iconic *Psycho*, the source of criminality here is insanity. However, congruent with post-1990s renditions of the serial killer/"super predator," the solution involves preemptory violence, not analysis and treatment by a psychiatrist. Rather than a medical condition that calls for sympathy and hospitalization, Axel's wolfish violence is an inherent evil that must be flushed out and entirely eradicated. Less obviously postmodern than the others we discuss, slasher-like, *Deep* offers a predictable moral that requires the survival of the most androgynous, least sexual characters.

4 Red Riding Hood (Italian, 2003)

With the tag line "God forgives ... Jenny doesn't," and opening with the warning "Don't ever tell this tale to your kids," *Red Riding Hood* begins with the assassination of a conservative judge. His wife runs off with her young lover, leaving 12 year old Jenny (Susanna Satta) alone in Rome with cash, credit and a craving for righteousness on her own terms. Her voice-over comments: "Now I know what I want: to improve my education, serve justice, reinstate truth, basically what my father would have wanted me to do." Bicycling through Rome in her red boots, and accompanied by her alter-ego George (her puppy "grown up"), who wears a long black cape and wolf mask, Jenny wreaks homicidal wrath on purse snatchers, hit and run drivers, shoplifters, adulterers, and blackmailers.

64. Elley, "*Deep*," p. 28.
65. Brian Yuzna, DVD commentary.

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When grandmother Rose (Kathleen Archebald) arrives to take Jenny back to New York, the girl sends her to bed for a nap. After dinner, Jenny tells Rose the story of "'Little Red Riding Hood,' the uncut version, told by the wolf, a story that finally uncovers the truth." It includes a litterbug Red and the wolf's complaint that Red is disrespectful, including making comments about his teeth. "You know how I have a complex about them," he says. The tale's grandmother "spread rumours that wolves eat little kids ... And since then, the lives of all wolves have been miserable." The drugged Rose never hears the story's conclusion, but the next day Jenny promises "Don't worry, one of these days I'll get the wolf to tell you herself." When she finds out her dentist is an adulterer, she tells him "Check my canine teeth!" Yet when she finds that her tutor Tom (Roberto Purvis) (whom she loves) has reconciled with his girlfriend, a hand-held shot, apparently from Jenny's point of view, tracks through the woods. Grandmother Rose is on the receiving end of wolf/Red/Jenny's wrath, but she survives. Tom, perhaps the best candidate for a woodsman, also apparently recovers from the wounds Jenny inflicts. But the film's conclusion suggests that Jenny's psychosis remains, with wolf/dog George replaced by her father's corpse.

The tale's psychology, like its links to ATU 333, are more than somewhat murky. Jenny alternately sees herself as Red and wolf, victim and scourge. She understands her favorite literary figure, Don Quixote, as herself and her father, but she also wants to be Dulcinea to Tom's Quixote. The entire closing section may be Jenny's hallucination; armed only with a giant syringe, she simultaneously severs both dancing legs of a delivery man. Nevertheless, *Red*, like the other films, enacts its drama through doubling characters to question not only the criminal's identity but also crime's etiology. Jenny may be as appealing as *Freeway*'s Vanessa, but her criminality is as out of control as Wolverton's, and like *Deep*'s Axel, she is psychotic. Sharing Vanessa's strong, fearless vigilante role, like the *Wolves* townspeople, Jenny is essentially misguided.

As a popular statement about crime and its control, *Red*'s ambivalence is arguably postmodern. Lacking the moral certainty of 1970s conservative vigilante films, it hardly presents vengeance as a pragmatic alternative to the weak law-and-order state! Like other crime films of its era, *Red* may offer a cautionary tale about vigilantism gone too far. Yet it also invokes deranged-revenge narratives like *Taxi Driver*, leaving viewers unsure what is real and what is psychotic fantasy. However, unlike *Taxi Driver*, it is the (anti)heroine Jenny whose crime and depravity are out of control, not the immoral/amoral society. Indeed, Jenny's motives are mixed and personal; she drugs, poisons, and mutilates the grandmother who has only her best interests at heart, and even adulterers and shoplifters need fear her murderous wrath and over-the-top violence. The ATU 333 narrative in *Red* provides a postmodern twist on psychotic revenge fantasy tales, as in the other films we discuss, by undermining expectations of who is wolf and who the innocent victimized child.

5 *Little Erin Merryweather (American, 2003)*

The eponymous *Little Erin Merryweather* (Vigdis Anholt) becomes a serial killer because her father molested her when reading her the tale, and her crimes re-enact the

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search for her father in the "wolf's" belly, as well as the placement of rocks therein. *Erin* opens with a university student walking through the woods. Seeing a red-hooded, caped figure carrying a basket, he follows her. He tries to flee when he sees her face, but his failure is shown by a splash of blood on the snow and the caped figure obscuring an unmoving body. Three other murders follow, interspersed with a girl's memories and a voice-over, telling Erin's version of "Little Red Riding Hood," along with illustrations (which she paints while wearing her red cape). "Every night, Father would read from his favorite book, his favorite story. Father's dirty hands would turn the page ... A wolf appeared and showed his rage." This narration, Erin's English class fairy tale assignment, is punctuated by her recollections of the abuse, presided over by an eyeless Red Riding Hood doll.

Three friends who work for the student newspaper seek to solve the mystery of the serial killer's modus operandi, assisted by their abnormal psychology professor, Dr. Paula Sheffield (Elizabeth Callahan). Student Peter Broom (David Morwick) is attracted to librarian and fellow student Erin, who in those manifestations wears her cape with the black side out. As the body count mounts, the students discover that the killer's m.o. has a fairy tale precedent. The professor seeks a link to the serial killer's experience and finds it from a colleague who remembers a local pedophilia case: "Her father would read her fairy tales and molest her, violate her, and rape her." The girl speaks through her doll, and eventually tells the psychologist that a wolf had come and taken her father away. Realizing what the viewer has known from the beginning, that the librarian/artist/writer/student/serial killer is Erin (made up to resemble her doll), motivated by her pedophilia victimhood, Peter and Paula eventually chase her into the woods. Paula shoots her, but Erin escapes, and the final voice over warns: "This story doesn't end here, so tremble wolf, may you always live in fear."

The film's abnormal psychology class directly asks whether the insane should be considered responsible for crimes they commit. Yet it offers no answers. Paula may be more woodsman than grandmother, but there are hints that she, like the cop in *The Woodsman*, discussed below, has seen too much of the human nature's most reprehensible side. The film itself follows its horror/slasher forebears in leaving further dastardly deeds a distinct possibility. Yet its androgynously-named (Erin/Aaron) "final girl" is herself the perpetrator.[66] Like other "final girls," Erin is uninterested in sexual relationships – but the surviving "final boy" worships women from afar, unlike his sexually active friends whom Erin picks off one by one. Like Jenny in *Red*, Erin is a vigilante, but like *Freeway*'s Vanessa, she has her reasons. Erin's victims may be more obviously innocent or blameless than theirs, but her survival vindicates her position. Dressed as her Red Riding Hood doll – which, like Nicholas's in *Deep,* silently witnesses heinous deeds – Erin, like Seth and Gabriel in *Wolves*, has been grievously sinned against. But she also resembles *Red*'s Jenny and the townspeople of Kromer; her wrath finds victims at best innocent, and at worst fallible. Her vigilante justice, though misguided, ultimately aims at self-preservation – a salient quality of many crime film Reds and perhaps a nod toward the devolution of crime control to private individuals in

66. Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

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neoliberal times. The postmodern, gender-reversing slasher genre closing simultaneously, once again, invokes the doubling and reversal of the ATU 333 wolf and Red, grandmother and woodsman.

6 The Woodsman (American, 2003)

The Woodsman works to invest complex humanity in its paroled pedophile, Walter (Kevin Bacon), trying to avoid recidivism after 12 years in prison. The only apartment he can get overlooks a schoolyard. He finds carpentry work, and becomes involved with fellow-worker Vickie (Kyra Sedgwick), who herself experienced childhood sexual abuse. Other supporters include his employer Bob (David Alan Grier), brother-in-law Carlos (Benjamin Bratt), and counsellor Rosen (Michael Shannon). Detractors are employees Mary-Kay (Eve) and Pedro (Carlos Leon), and police officer Sgt. Lucas (Mos Def). The narrative also crucially involves Walter's observation and interaction with a pedophile stalking the schoolyard, whom he names Candy (Kevin Rice), and with his own potential victim Robin (Hannah Pilkes).

Walter's character draws on both woodsman and wolf. As literal and figurative woodsman,[67] he is a potential saviour for Candy's victims as well as for Hannah. As wolf, a potential re-offender, he strikes up a conversation with Hannah in a park. However, the script complicates the obvious associations of film to story characters. When Vickie walks into the factory, Pedro sexually harasses her, saying "You look good enough to eat, baby!" – alluding to the fairy tale's cannibalism/sex motif. Only momentarily wolf to Vickie's Red, Pedro quickly repositions when she retorts "Play with yourself, asshole" – rendering him the sexualized child (Red). Similarly, when Vickie offers Walter a ride in her truck, saying "Come on, I won't bite," she takes the wolf's role, initiating the relationship – alluding again to cannibalism/sex – with Walter the [R]ider (though he never wears red).[68] In contrast, Robin is multiply marked as Red, including her red jacket, age, vulnerability, and name. With no grandmother, the film focuses on interaction between wolf, Red, and woodsman. Ultimately Walter is neither truly wolf nor truly woodsman, as professional prison manager Jamie Bennett points out: "Walter pulls back from his approaches to the young girl, Robin, when she reveals that her father has been molesting her. He tells her to 'go home,' but there is no sanctuary there. Unlike the Woodsman saving Red Riding Hood from the Wolf, in saving Robin from himself, Walter does not grant her safety; there are no woodsmen in this world."[69]

Walter is not the only failed rescuer. The film's explicit reference to ATU 333 links to another narration, when Sgt. Lucas tells of a violent and murderous pedophilia case, which has clearly scarred him both personally and professionally. This juxtaposition offers the possibility that Lucas himself could be the fairy tale saviour, but he

67. As carpenter, see Rafter, "Crime."
68. Director Nicole Kassell deliberately avoided the color red except around children, or when making allusions to children (like the red ball that symbolizes Walter's pedophilic desires). DVD commentary.
69. "Seeing the Wood from the Trees: Reading the Woodsman," *Prison Service Journal* 166 (2006), p. 56.

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sardonically comments "There ain't no fuckin' woodsman in this world." Walter's ambivalent moment of woodsman-like apparent rescue, when he beats up Candy (momentarily seeing himself in Candy's face) serves to align him "with more respectable forms of violent masculinity."[70] Thus, though *The Woodsman* sketches a sympathetic, even realistic, portrait of a recently released sex offender, it nevertheless reinforces stereotypes of the stranger pedophile stalking victims in parks and neighborhood playgrounds, luring prepubescent boys with sweets. Jon Davies characterizes as homophobic the presentation of Candy – an irredeemable homosexual pedophile – contrasting with the heterosexual pedophile Walter – earnestly seeking to avoid re-offending.[71] Indeed, Candy's presence mainly serves Walter's need violently to punish his (own) offense, while realizing and regretting the damage he has done to his young victims.

Bennett notes that "Filming a sensitive portrayal of a released child sex offender is a challenging job in today's moral, political and social environment. Media and political campaigns have vilified sex offenders and public fear is out of proportion to the reality of the risk … The strategy of the film involves presenting the perspective of a sex offender as legitimate," again hardly a mainstream view in current popular culture.[72] Though it demonstrates more complex psychological profiles and realistic characters than the foregoing examples, *The Woodsman* nevertheless employs similar strategies in using the ATU 333 narrative. The doubling of characters assists in narrating its unconventional point of view. Walter's woodsman-like vigilantism against Candy uncomfortably turns him, like Erin Merryweather particularly, and perhaps also like Jenny in *Red*, into a wolf whose punishments of others proceed from his own self-hatred more than from a sense of justice.

7 *Hard Candy (American, 2005)*

Hard Candy blurs even more the line between nurturer/aggressor, victim/rescuer, and even psychopathology/sanity. Hayley (Ellen Page) the Red/wolf and Jeff (Patrick Wilson) the wolf/Red regularly exchange positions throughout the film. Viewers may alternately root for Hayley and pity the tormented Jeff. Sandra Beckett comments that "Many allusions to the story of Little Red Riding Hood are strictly visual."[73] Indeed, the clearest link to ATU 333 is Hayley's red hoodie. Writer Brian Nelson comments "It was not actually an intentional 'Red Riding Hood' statement at all; that was something that people brought to the film later." Actors Page and Wilson call it "a coincidence." Yet director David Slade notes that "later on we could have changed" the red hoodie

70. Carol-Ann Hooper and Ann Kaloski, "Rewriting 'The Paedophile:' a Feminist Reading of *The Woodsman*," *Feminist Review* 83 (2006), p. 153.
71. "Imagining Intergenerationality: Representation and Rhetoric in the Pedophile Movie," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13 (2007), 2–3, pp. 369–85.
72. "Reel life after prison: Repression and reform in films about release from prison," *Probation Journal* 55 (2008) 4, pp. 361–2. See also Mike Nellis, "The aesthetics of redemption: Released prisoners in American film and literature," *Theoretical Criminology* 12 (2009) 1, pp. 129–46 and Graham Vickers, *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov's Little Girl All Over Again* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2008).
73. *Recycling*, p. 5.

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reference, but they chose not to do so. Nelson says "We would call it part of the unconscious poetry of the film."[74]

The film follows 14 year old Hayley, who meets thirtyish Jeff in a chat room and arranges to meet at a café, where a poster advertises a missing girl. Hayley goes back to Jeff's house. They drink wine and she offers to pose for photographs. She spikes his drink and he awakes to find himself tied up. She accuses him of pedophilia, and locates incriminating evidence (never revealed to the viewer). Though Jeff eventually admits only to "watching," the balance of the film involves Hayley's psychological torture of him (including a castration performance). Although Jeff escapes momentarily several times, Hayley eventually manipulates him into hanging himself.

For North American audiences used to polarized good and bad guys, who exchange triumphs but never moral positions, Hayley and Jeff in *Hard Candy* may be just too postmodernly ambivalent. Adrian Schober's insight that "recent filmic depictions uncomfortably blur the usually safe boundaries between normal and pathological to ultimately expose the 'latent' pedophile within society at large"[75] prophesies both *The Woodsman* and *Hard Candy*, but the latter goes much further in normalizing the apparently pathological and pathologizing the apparently normal. The expectation that Hayley would be Red, or perhaps even woodsman, to Jeff's uncomplicated wolf is rigorously denied. Its creators claim the film interrogates the vigilante film, asking how much revenge is too much. Nelson notes "We do have this culture that likes to sexualize teenage girls and even younger girls and then somehow makes it the fault of those girls." With the academic critics of *The Woodsman*, Slade calls the term pedophile "the most abusive word in the human language." But others have called Hayley a "very ambiguous little girl ... new Lolita for the cyberage" and draw attention to her "stunning metamorphosis from breathless young teen to self-assured psychopath."[76] Because her identity is forged online, viewers never know for certain that Hayley is who she claims to be. Certainly, her actions and words suggest a level of maturity beyond that of most 14 year olds. Along with the wolf/Red duality implicit in her character, Hayley in turns acts as naïve teen and as hardened young adult. Perhaps closest to Jenny in *Red*, she seeks to punish evildoers, acting as judge, jury, and executioner, but in this role she also invokes *The Woodsman*'s Walter. A fearsome avenger like Erin or *Freeway*'s Vanessa, she also shares with *Deep*'s Axel a dualistic mix of psychopathology and apparently existential weakness.

74. DVD commentary. Various media and institutional narratives about child exploitation arguably follow the structure of "Little Red Riding Hood" and other fairy tales. See Umni Khan, "Having Your Porn and Condemning it Too: A Case Study of a 'Kiddie Porn' Expose," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 5 (2009) 3, pp. 391–424.

75. "'The Thoughts in Your Head:' The Pedophile as 'Other' in Sidney Lumet's *The Offence*," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 35 (2002) 3, p. 134. See also Steven Kohm and Pauline Greenhill, "Pedophile Crime Films as Popular Criminology: A Problem of Justice?" *Theoretical Criminology* 15 (2011), pp. 195–215.

76. Vickers, *Chasing*, pp. 88, 89.

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III. Dastardly Deeds or Postmodern Puzzles?

Over the past century, films have reflected and countered conventional and professional wisdom about crime's causes and appropriate societal reactions to criminal transgression. Since the 1990s, Western crime films reflect changing cinematic styles, but also hardening political discourses around individual criminal responsibility, and growing public fear of random violence and predatory strangers. The narrative structure and imagery of "Little Red Riding Hood" trenchantly encapsulates these trends. Not only does it conventionally warn against the timeless dangers of predatory monsters lurking to prey on the innocent and weak, but in a neoliberal era of retreating and downsized state social welfare and security agencies, it proffers a lesson in self-reliance and the necessity for private action to forestall crime. However, these seven films do not concur about the nature of crime nor the use of vengeance in the face of the criminal justice state's retreat. Instead, ATU 333 crime films produced since the 1990s critically reflect upon the nature of victimization and appropriate responses for individuals who possess little power in neoliberal times. The familiar story provides a convenient cultural referent to elucidate social, political, and criminological shifts at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.

Simultaneously, postmodern approaches to filmmaking disrupt the established moral structure of crime films, offering multiple points of view, moral ambiguity, blurred generic boundaries, and ironic, even playful, approaches to otherwise grim subject matter. Where little agreement emerges from professional and academic criminological discourses on crime's causes, or counters to the general public's erroneous view of its growing menace, and as serial killers and sexual offenders become the current bogeymen,[77] some crime films take up and refract this academic discord and public anxiety. ATU 333's structures and symbols help film makers and viewers navigate this terrain. Serial killers and pedophiles figure as wolves while heroes and victims take up their expected positions as Woodsman and Red. However, with a postmodern turn, these roles invariably blur and reverse, disorienting the familiar and denying the easy solutions Rafter sees as central to conventional crime films.

The manifestly gendered and sexualized core narrative aids this destabilization's enactment. Pedophiles and rapists are exclusively male, but killers may be female or male. Girls and young women succeed in their vigilantism, even when it is misdirected. Men bungle rescues or fail outright, sometimes sustaining serious injuries in the process. That Vanessa, Sophie, Jenny, Erin, and Hayley take the law into their own hands to protect themselves and/or other innocents could be neoliberal discourse making women responsible for their own protection, rather than making men responsible for violence or the authorities responsible for security. However, these Red Riding Hood/wolves are *girls* (except Erin, acting for her victimized girl self) killing *adult men* (except gender-inclusive Jenny), suggesting that they instantiate third-wave feminist emphases on girl power and female self-reliance. *Freeway*, *Red Riding Hood*, *Little Erin Merryweather*, and *Hard Candy* offer discourses of angry girls, "pissed off and ready to do something

77. Jon Silverman and David Wilson, *Innocence Betrayed: Paedophilia, the Media and Society* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2002), p. 1.

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about it,"[78] begging both feminist and post-feminist readings. But even in films outside the latter discourses, weak characters tend to be male. In *The Wolves of Kromer*, the two gay male wolf/red riding hoods are murdered, and gay Axel is dead at *Deep in the Woods*' close. Candy from *The Woodsman*, brutally beaten and arrested, adds to this series of gay male failures, uncomfortably recalling the early 1990s need to kill and/or make killers of bold (proto)lesbian characters, from *Thelma and Louise* (1991) to *Basic Instinct* (1992) or even *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991).[79] The implicitly heterosexual killer girls/women don't get killed – not even serial killer Erin or the murderous Doreen and Fanny in *Wolves*.

Further, the films sometimes subvert discourses of race, ethnicity, class, and crime. White trash Vanessa, her African American boyfriend, and her Chicana girlfriends are criminalized, but they are also victims. Vanessa's rainbow coalition, including African American cop Mike Breer (Wolfgang Bodison), bands together to ensure that yet another rich white dude does not literally get away with murder, suggesting "that intra-racial solidarity might be a means to dismantle class- and race-based hegemony."[80] *The Woodsman* uses an ethnically mixed cast in which perpetrators and criminals are white. The rest of the films have nasty upper and middle class white male criminals (like Axel, the vicar, and Jeff) who too often, like Wolverton, prey on weak, sometimes underclass targets. However, no univocal politics of crime emerges from this series of crime films; they remain open and interpretable, like the tales from which they draw inspiration, characters, and plots.

Often undermining audience cravings for vindication of the innocent and punishment of the wicked, ATU 333 provides an irreverent vehicle to interrogate crime's etiology, current crime control policies, and the impulse toward vigilantism and privatized justice in neoliberal times. These films deny their viewers simple fairy-tale endings, substituting contradiction and ambivalence for easy answers. *The Woodsman* simultaneously suggests redemption *and* vigilante violence for pedophiles. Likewise, *Freeway* highlights the need for self reliance in the face of an incompetent and flawed criminal justice state. It advocates harsh consequences for predatory criminals (wolves), while eschewing the tough rhetoric of America's contemporaneous prison boom. *The Wolves of Kromer* and *Hard Candy* suggest that vigilantes can themselves be perpetrators, with motives anything but pure. *Deep in the Woods*, *Little Erin Merryweather*, and *Red Riding Hood* simultaneously punish crazed criminals and vilify the neoliberal darling – traditional family values – that originated and nurtured their insanity. In short, the familiarity of ATU 333, combined with its attendant moral lessons and great adaptability, have provided critical and postmodern film makers with a genre- and gender-bending tool to interrogate late modern trends in crime and crime control while criticizing conventional and professional orthodoxies. In this way, "Little Red Riding Hood" provides the narrative backbone for a variety of critical postmodern variations on the theme of predatory crime in contemporary culture.

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78. Roberts, "Pleasures," p. 217.
79. Janice Ristock, "Kiss and Kill: Some Impacts of Cultural Representations of Women's Sexualities," in Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye, eds., *Undisciplined Women: Tradition and Culture in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), pp.139–50.
80. Roberts, "Pleasures," p. 226.

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